

Inscriptions

– contemporary thinking on art, philosophy and psycho-analysis –
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Title: Editorial

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Section: Editorial

Keywords: editorial; objectivism; subject; engagement; disability

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Received: 10 July, 2024.

Accepted: 11 July, 2024.

Published: 15 July, 2024.

How to cite: *Inscriptions*. Editorial. *Inscriptions* 7, no. 2 (July 2024): 107–107.
<https://doi.org/10.59391/inscriptions.v7i2.261>.

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Editorial

Is it possible to obtain *objective* knowledge of the social world? This question has plagued philosophy at least since Immanuel Kant made a distinction between the *phenomena* we experience and the *noumena* or the things in themselves, as formulated in *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781. In the thought of Pierre Bourdieu, this distinction took on an even more acute character. Hitherto, Bourdieu claimed in *Méditations Pascaliennes* (1997), ethnographers and social theorists had too often relied on a fully conscious, rational and absolute subject “produced by the discourse on the human being.” Nevertheless, the absolute, God-like character of the knowing subject was doomed after Kant: absolute knowledge is only possible for a subject without limitations, which is not the case for human subjects, who are limited in our knowledge by our perceptive apparatus. As Margrit Schildrick (2004) pointed out, autonomous sovereign subjects, detached from and prior to the social fields and conditions in which they conduct research, are reliant on an agency that precedes and acts on particular contexts, rather than emerging from and being immersed in them.

It is this notion of autonomous sovereignty that comes under renewed critique in Philipp Quell’s contribution in this issue of *Inscriptions*: how can we, Quell asks, prepare the ground for the emergence of “queer writing,” i.e., textual expressions that rely on the context in which academic expression occurs as the necessary condition for its possibility? His answer is that scholars must move beyond the idea of “pure theory”: academic writing must abandon the idea of an impartial and detached position and fully embrace the messy post-colonial perspective according to which no single geographic or scholastic position can claim universality.

The question of commitment on the side of the scholar is also forcefully present in Andrew Jorn’s essay “Crip sovereignty: Bataille and the ethics of wasting away.” Jorn draws on Georges Bataille’s work to supplement crip theory by asking how we can celebrate degradation as a the *a priori* condition of a collective commitment to preventing global catastrophic suffering. This notion of degradation differs radically from the one articulated by liberal disability studies. Thus, Jorn suggests that by shifting the responsibility for transgression from the individual onto society, we can move beyond an ideology of “celebration” associated with the “indeterminacy” and “heterogeneity” of the disabled person. Can a society that celebrates waste and uselessness give rise to a different kind of social responsibility?

In addition, based on their experience of the El Eco museum and the *Black Water* art installation, David Habets, Julian Kiverstein, Erik Rietveld, and Damiaan Denys ask if such sites can engender an intimacy that is generative of self-exploration and recognition. Showing how experiences of art share characteristics with therapy, Habets *et al.* propose that such experiences carry with them the possibility of an opening to confront difficult emotions and experiences that might otherwise go unnoticed. Therefore, the art-exposed person becomes a knowing subject that is malleable, shifting, and situated in specific contexts. As the authors show, one scholastic path to recognising such opportunities for subjective recalibration can be found in the inclusion of personal and subjective motifs in the act of academic writing.

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